

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 PARIS 19925

E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, FR

SUBJECT: HOSTAGE DISCUSSIONS UGANDA HIJACKING

1. LE MONDE OF JULY 8 CARRIES AN INTERESTING INTERVIEW WITH MICHEL COJOT, ONE OF THE HOSTAGES ABOARD THE HIJACKED AIR FRANCE PLANE, WHO IS DESCRIBED AS AN OFFICIAL OF A LARGE MULTILATERAL FIRM. REPORTEDLY COJOT IS BILINGUAL AND SERVED AS INTERPRETER BETWEEN THE HOSTAGES AND THE HIJACKERS AND WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR OBTAINING CERTAIN PRIVILEGES FOR THE HOSTAGES AND SOME EARLY LIBERATIONS. COJOT RETURNED TO PARIS JULY 1 WITH THE SECOND GROUP OF FREED HOSTAGES. EMBASSY TRANSLATION OF THE INTERVIEW FOLLOWS:

2. QUESTION: SINCE THE FREEING OF THE FIRST HOSTAGES, TESTIMONY HAS INDICATED ACTIVE UGANDAN COMPLICITY, EVEN THAT OF MARSHALL IDI AMIN DADA, WITH THE COMMANDO WHICH HIJACKED THE AIRBUS. WHAT IS THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER?

ANSWER: WE WERE TOLD THAT WE WOULD ARRIVE IN UGANDA

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ONLY HALF AN HOUR BEFORE LANDING. DEEP WITHIN ME I

FELT THAT THIS WAS VERY ASTUTE, FIRST, BECAUSE NO ONE HAD THOUGHT OF IT BEFORE, AND THEN, BECAUSE AMIN WAS, BASICALLY, ONE OF THE FEW CHIEFS OF STATE WHOSE PERSONALITY COULD ACCOMMODATE ITSELF TO THIS SITUATION. EVEN IN LIBYA, THE TERRORISTS WERE NOT SURE OF THEMSELVES. THE PROOF: WE CIRCLED AN HOUR AND A HALF BEFORE LANDING IN BENGAZI. IT WAS NOT EVIDENT THAT ANY ARAB STATE WISHED TO ENCUMBER ITSELF WITH A DIPLOMATIC PROBLEM OF THIS DIMENSION AND BECOME ACCOMPLICE TO THIS STYLE OF ACTION. WITH AMIN, THE CONTRARY WAS TRUE.

THE LANDING SPOT WAS PROBABLY DETERMINED AND KNOWN BY AMIN DADA; ONE DOES NOT GO TO THE END OF A LONG RUN WITH A MEDIUM-RANGE PLANE WITHOUT KNOWING ITS DESTINATION.

3. Q: DID THE UGANDAN PRESIDENT KNOW ABOUT IT DURING THE LAST HOURS OF THE FLIGHT OR HAD HE BEEN TOLD AT THE TIME OF THE PLANNING OF THE OPERATIONS

A: I DO NOT KNOW AT WHAT PRECISE MOMENT HE LEARNED ABOUT THE BUSINESS, BUT, IN MY MIND, THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT HE WAS IN AGREEMENT AND AN ACCOMPLICE.

4. Q: WHAT PROOFS DO YOU HAVE?

A: I HAVE NO IRREFUTABLE PROOFS BUT A BUNDLE OF PRESUMPTIONS SUFFICIENT TO ESTABLISH MY CONVICTION.

(A) WE ARRIVED OVER ENTEBBE WITHOUT ANY (GAS) RESERVE. THUS NEGOTIATIONS WERE NO LONGER POSSIBLE. ONE MIGHT CERTAINLY IMAGINE THAT AMIN HAD, ON THIS POINT, BEEN PLACED BEFORE A FAIT ACCOMPLI. BUT THE REST MAKES ONE THINK THE CONTRARY.

(B) AFTER THE LANDING AT ENTEBBE, THE MILITARY DISCIPLINE OF THE COMMANDO, EXTREMELY STRICT SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE OPERATION, LOOSENED UP. THE FOUR TERRORISTS WHO HAD BEEN DISTRIBUTED WITHIN THE PLANE

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REGROUPED IN THE FORWARD PART AND BEGAN TO ARRANGE THEIR MATERIAL IN THEIR BAGS AND KEPT ONLY A PISTOL, WITH THE SAFETY CATCH ON, WHICH THEY SLID UNDER THEIR

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BELTS, WHILE PREVIOUSLY THEY KEPT IT IN THEIR HANDS, EVEN TO EAT. THE GRENADES WERE GATHERED AND PUT INTO POCKETS. IT WAS AT THAT MOMENT THAT THEY COULD HAVE BEEN OVERPOWERED, BUT IT WAS NOT WORTH THE EFFORT FOR IF THEY CARRIED ON THIS WAY, IT WAS BECAUSE THEY WERE PROBABLY IN FRIENDLY TERRITORY.

(C) INDEED, OUR COMMANDO HAD BEEN JOINED BY THREE ARMED PALESTINIANS WHO MOVED FREELY ABOUT THE AIRPORT IN DIPLOMATIC VEHICLES. THE PIRATES, TIRED, WENT TO SLEEP; THEY WERE REPLACED BY THEIR THREE COLLEAGUES AND THE UGANDAN SOLDIERS. ONE OF THESE SOLDIERS, MOREOVER, STATIONING HIMSELF WITH A MACHINE GUN TURNED TOWARD THE SPOT WHERE WE WERE PARKED.

(D) THE YOUNG UGANDANS WHO WERE CLEANING THE TOILETS GATHERED AND CAREFULLY UNFOLDED, EVIDENTLY ON ORDERS, THE PAPERS WHICH COULD HAVE BEEN THROWN THERE.

(E) WE HAD BEEN ABLE TO HAVE THE DIRECTOR OF THE
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AIRPORT VISIT US BRINGING MERCHANDISE FROM HIS NON-DUTY SHOP. AS SOMETHING WAS MISSING, I SAID TO HIM IN JEST: "IT IS NOT EASY TO RECEIVE 267 PERSONS UNEXPECTEDLY". HE LOOKED AT ME, ASTONISHED, AND REPLIED, "BUT I EXPECTED YOU". IN FACT, FROM THE FIRST LUNCH THERE WAS ENOUGH FOR EVERYBODY. I DO NOT KNOW IF THE ENTEBBE AIRPORT IS EQUIPPED TO RECEIVE NEARLY 300 PERSONS FROM DNE SECOND TO THE NEXT.

(F) THE LAST ELEMENT OF PRESUMPTION -- MARSHALL AMIN'S OWN WORDS. HE CAME TO SEE US THREE TIMES IN FOUR DAYS. HIS LAST SPEECH WAS MORE POLITICAL AND TOTALLY ACCEPTED THE VIEW OF OUR JAILERS. HE DF CDURSE CLAIMED CREDIT FOR THE LIBERATION DF THE FIRST HOSTAGES BEFORE DECLARING, "I KNOW THAT YOU ARE ALL INNOCENT, BUT I WISH YOU TO PUT PRESSURE ON YOUR GOVERNMENTS TO FIND A JUST SOLUTION TO THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM. THE WORLD WILL NOT KNOW PEACE UNTIL THIS PROBLEM IS SETTLED".

5. Q: THOSE ARE THE WORDS WHICH THE DOVES OF THE TWO CAMPS FAVORABLE TO A RAPPROCHMENT MIGHT USE.

A: BUT HE ADDED. "I WAS RECENTLY RECEIVED IN SYRIA BY THE JEWISH COMMUNITY WHICH INVITED ME INTO ITS 'CHURCH'. THEY SEEMED PERFECTLY HAPPY TO ME. I DO NOT SEE WHY THE JEWS FELT THE NECESSITY TO TAKE THE PALESTINIANS' LAND FROM THEM". HIS KNOWLEDGE OF THE PROBLEM SEEMED VERY ELEMENTARY. HE REPEATED LESSONS AND SLOGANS.

6. Q: WHAT DID HE SAY IN HIS TWO PRECEDING SPEECHES?

A: THE FIRST TIME HE WISHED ABOVE ALL TO SHOW HIMSELF TO THOSE WHO BY CHANCE HAD NOT SEEN HIM. THEN HE ASSURED US THAT HE WAS WORRIED ABOUT OUR FATE AND HAD THUS GOTTEN US DEBARKED. RATHER REASSURING WORDS. IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT WE WERE FORCED TO APPLAUD. THAT IS NOT TRUE. A CERTAIN NUMBER OF PEOPLE APPLAUDED HIM ON HIS ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE WITHOUT BEING FORCED TO DO SO. WE WERE A SMALL SAMPLE OF HUMANITY AND THE REACTIONS OF CERTAIN PEOPLE IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES ARE SOME-
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TIMES TROUBLING AND REVEALING.

THE SECOND SPEECH WAS INTENDED TO ANNOUNCE THE FREEING OF WOMEN, CHILDREN, OLD PEOPLE AND MEDICAL CASES.

7. Q: DID THE COMMANDO EXPLAIN THE POLITICAL OBJECTIVES OF ITS ACTIONS?

A: UPON ARRIVING AT ENTEBBE, THE GERN WHO WAS COMMANDING THE GROUP READ A COMMUNIQUE WHICH I TRANSLATED. IT SAID IN SUBSTANCE, "FRANCE IS IN THE FIRST RANK OF THE ENEMIES OF THE ARAB PEOPLE. IT FURNISHED MIRAGES TO ISRAEL AND, ON THE PRETEXT OF HELPING CONSTRUCT A TEXTILE FACTORY, GAVE IT A NUCLEAR CAPACITY. IT GIVES INFORMATION TO MASSAD (ISRAELI SECRET SERVICE). ABOUT 50 LIBERTY FIGHTERS HAVE DIED IN THE STREETS OF PARIS, ASSASSINATED WITHOUT ANY GUILTY PARTY HAVING BEEN FOUND".

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THESE ARGUMENTS COULD NOT CONVINCE ME. LATER, THE GERMAN CONFESSED THAT HE HAD CHOSEN "AIR FRANCE" BECAUSE IT IS "EASIER" THAN "EL AL".

THE COMMUNIQUE NEXT TRIED TO EXPLAIN THE NON-PALESTINIAN IDENTITY OF CERTAIN OF THE PALESTINIAN TERRORISTS. "THE PFLP IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF A WORLD REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT WHICH FIGHTS AGAINST IMPERIALISM IN ALL ITS FORMS AND IN ALL PARTS OF THE PLANET". IT THEN CITED, PELL MELL, THE "LIBERATION FIGHTS" IN ERITREA, DJIBOUTI, PALESTINE, ETC. IN SUM, IT WAS A NEW INTERNATIONAL.

8. Q: DID YOU TRY TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THEIR MOVEMENT?

A: FOR ME IT WAS IMPORTANT TO NEGOTIATE, TO OBTAIN ADVANTAGES FOR THE HOSTAGES, BUT NEVER TO COLLABORATE. A NARROW PATH. I DID NOT SPEAK WITH THE GIRL WHO DID UNCLASSIFIED

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NOT SEEM BALANCED TO ME. ON THE OTHER HAND, I WAS ABLE TO TALK WITH THE GERMAN, THE CHIEF OF THE COMMANDO, WHO HAD ASKED THAT HE BE CALLED BASEL AND WHOM I CALLED KLAUS OR WOLFGANG, ONCE OBER KAPITAN AND ONCE OBERSTURMFUHRER. HE SMILED. HE WORE A DARK SUIT, NO TIE, AND HAD A RATHER NICE AIR. MOREOVER, MANY PEOPLE FOUND HIM LIKEABLE; ASSASSINS DON'T NECESSARILY LOOK LIKE ASSASSINS.

I ASKED HIM IF, AS A MILITANT ANTI-FASCIST, A NATIONAL OF A COUNTRY WHICH FORMERLY HAD BEEN IN THE FRONT RANK OF THE FASCIST STATES AND WHICH, CONSEQUENTLY, HAD MADE THE JEWS SUFFER SO GREATLY, HE WAS NOT TROUBLED TO GO AFTER THESE SAME JEWS 35 YEARS LATER. HE REPLIED, "THE OBJECTIVES ARE DIFFERENT, OURS ARE VERY GENEROUS. THE MEANS ARE DIFFERENT, WE ARE VERY CORRECT".

9. Q? THE HOSTAGES WERE CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO WHETHER THEY HAVE ISRAELI NATIONALITY OR NOT. HOW WAS THAT DONE?

A: IT WAS A MOVEMENT OF GREAT TENSION (SIC). I HAD ASKED THAT THE SECOND FLOOR BE OPENED TO US BECAUSE WE WERE PACKED IN. IN FACT, WE WERE GIVEN AN ADJOINING ROOM. BUT AT THE MOMENT WHEN WE WERE GOING TO SPREAD OUT INTO THIS ROOM, THE TERRORISTS ARRIVED AND SAID: "THE PEOPLE WITH THE FOLLOWING NAMES SHOULD STEP TO ONE SIDE". AFTER THE THIRD NAME, IT WAS ALREADY EVIDENT THAT THE ISRAELIS WERE BEING SINGLED OUT.

10. Q: WAS THIS FIRST DISCRIMINATION DOUBLED, AS HAS BEEN SAID, BY A SECOND, BETWEEN JEWS AND NON-JEWS?

A: PROBLEMS OF DOUBLE NATIONALITY AND DIFFICULTIES FOR LONG-TIME RESIDENTS OF ISRAEL AROSE. BUT MANY PEOPLE GOT RID OF CERTAIN PAPERS; THE TOILETS WERE CONSTANTLY STOPPED UP AND THAT WAS NOT DUE ONLY TO THE BAD FUNCTIONING OF UGANDAN PLUMBING. THERE WERE SEVERAL DRAMATIC PERSONAL CASES, SUCH AS TWO SISTERS, UNCLASSIFIED

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ONE ISRAELI, AND THE OTHER NOT, WHO WERE SEPARATED. THE KNIFE DROPPED. BUT IT WAS NEVER OFFICIAL SEGREGATION BETWEEN JEWS AND NON-JEWS.

IT SHOULD BE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT THE 20 OTHER PERSONS REMAINING AT ENTEBBE, EXCLUSIVE OF THE CREW AND THE ISRAELIS, AFTER THE SECOND GROUP OF HOSTAGES WERE FREED, WERE NEARLY ALL JEWS AND PROBABLY SUSPECTED BY THE COMMANDO OF PRO-ZIONIST ACTIVITIES. ISRAELI VISAS ON FRENCH PASSPORTS DOUBTLESSLY COUNTED, BUT OUR JAILERS NEVER OPENLY INTRODUCED THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN JEWS AND NON-JEWS. IN PRACTICE . . .

11. Q: WHAT WAS THE ROLE OF THE AIRBUS CREW?

A: DURING THE FLIGHT IT PLAYED ITS NORMAL ROLE UNDER CONDITIONS WHICH WERE NOT (NORMAL). MOREOVER, IT REASSURED THE PASSENGERS AND THE TERRORISTS. IF AFTER BENGHAZI THE LATTER GATHERED TOGETHER THEIR GRENADES AND PUT ON SAFETY CATCHES, IT WAS BECAUSE THEY WERE PERSUADED OF THE FACT THAT THE CREW WOULD NOT PLAY TRICKS ON THEM. THAT SHOULD BE CREDITED TO THE

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MEN IN THE COCKPIT.

ON THE GROUND, THE CREW TRIED TO MAKE LIFE FOR THE HOSTAGES AS GOOD AS POSSIBLE. THE MECHANIC LED ONE OF THE DISCUSSIONS WHICH WERE ORGANIZED TO OCCUPY PEOPLE AND TO MAKE THE TIME PASS. HE SPOKE ABOUT THE AIRBUS. ONCE THE ISRAELIS WERE SEPARATED FROM THE REST OF THE HOSTAGES, ONLY THE CREW WAS AUTHORIZED TO COMMUNICATE WITH THEM. IT WAS ESSENTIAL THAT THESE ISRAELIS NOT BE FORGOTTEN AND THERE, ONCE AGAIN, THE CREW PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE. ON THE WHOLE, THE CREW'S COMPORTMENT CAN ONLY BE PRAISED.

12. Q: HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THE TONE OF THE COMMUNIQUE READ BY THE CREW AFTER ITS ARRIVAL IN PARIS HAILING THE ATTITUDE OF THE UGANDAN PRESIDENT?

A: THERE ARE A CERTAIN NUMBER OF FRENCH CITIZENS IN UGANDA. IN ADDITION, AN AIRBUS IS THERE. CONSIDERING THE PAST, THE REPRISALS EXERCISED IN THAT UNCLASSIFIED

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COUNTRY ON NATIONALS OF VARIOUS COUNTRIES, ASIAN AND WESTERN, ONE CAN UNDERSTAND WHY THEY WERE TRYING TO THINK OF THE FUTURE. BECAUSE OF THIS FACT, I APPROVE OF THE CREW. MOREOVER, IT IS CORRECT TO SAY THAT ON THE MATERIAL PLANE, AMIN DADA DID DO MUCH FOR US. WE MIGHT HAVE BEEN LEFT IN THE PLANE. NO ONE WAS FORCED TO GIVE US MEDICINE OR TO NOURISH US, AS WAS DONE, INCLUDING AND TAKING ACCOUNT OF THOSE WHO WISHED TO EAT KOSHER FOOD. INCONTESTABLY, WE WERE

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